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**Itinerant Nationalisms and Fracturing Narratives:
Incorporating Regional Dimensions of Memory into Peace-Building**

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Abstract. Whilst conflict is often understood across multiple levels, including its regional dimension, peace-building and memory work are rarely put in conversation at this level. The paper explores regional dimensions of memory and argues that these open a novel and analytically productive lens on the nature and legacy of cross-border conflict and can bolster peace-building approaches. Taking the key case study of the Great Lakes Region of Africa, and specifically the regionalizing dimensions of the Rwandan genocide, the paper investigates the impact of two very different regional dimensions of memory on social cohesion. First, the paper considers the more intuitive ways in which grievances that extend across borders and fractured regional memories continue to fuel conflict. Second, and pushing beyond this, the paper considers the ways in which returning diaspora deploys memory born in the wider region in attempts at nation-building. The paper thus deploys a dynamic approach to memory, exploring mobile memories and the ways in which regional experiences are carried and deployed back in a national context. Overall, the paper urges us to extend regional lens beyond the study of conflict roots and operational action to the study of post-conflict peace-building and commemoration.

Keywords. memory, conflict, transborder imaginaries, regionalism, vicarious remembrance, nation building

Introduction

Scholars in political science and international relations have long deployed concepts such as ‘regional security complex’ⁱ (Buzan and Weaver 2003) or ‘regional conflict formations’ⁱⁱ (RCFs) (Rubin 2001 in VanLeeuwen 2008: 395) to analyze complex conflicts spanning borders such as that in the Great Lakes of Africa. But we know little about the implications of this for memory. Is there a ‘regional memory complex’ to match, that is an interacting system of memory operating across the region? And if memory is not simply an outcome but ingredient in conflict dynamics, what is the nature of the interaction? It was a recent Oxford University workshop that for the first time gathered scholars together to explicitly reflect on questions such as this. How do we study memory ‘beyond and above national narratives and frameworks’ⁱⁱⁱ? Is one possible way of doing this by thinking of ‘regions of memory’ and regional dimensions of memory? If so, what is the locus, anatomy and role of such memory in an ongoing conflict? And if memory of conflict spans the region, what are then the implications for coming to terms with such past in our attempts at resolution—through mechanisms such as transitional justice, reconciliation, reconstructions of history— which thus far lack this dimension?

In the past decade, the study of conflict and its resolution, especially in cases of community-based, localized, even intimate violence characteristic of civil wars, have turned from the macro, international and state level to the micro-level, producing valuable insights into local drivers, grassroots participation, and the alliances between micro and macro actors (see e.g. Kalyvas 2003 & 2006). Similarly, we have witnessed a ‘local turn’ in the study of both transitional justice and peace building (see Waldorf and Shaw; Autesserre 2012 & 2010 on the latter). This shift of perspective has proven

immensely valuable and has certainly not eschewed critique of simplistic notions of local ownership, traditionality or hybridity. In this paper, however, I go against the grain of studying ‘smaller rather than larger’ and redirect our attention to the importance of studying dimensions of memory that reach across borders but are simultaneously contained within a defined area of networked space. I look at shared^{iv} imaginary and grievance ‘located’ in this manner and the way in which it impacts on conflict transformation and peace-building prospects— a vector thus far eschewed in scholarly analysis and with import beyond academia. If memory at regional level is indeed an active ingredient¹ in conflict dynamics (deployed by actors to either fuel or diffuse conflict)— whether in form of cross-border fractures and grievance, or conversely ‘itinerant nationalisms,’ ideologies and narratives of social cohesion— this creates tensions and important questions vis-à-vis conflict resolution. In what follows, I argue and demonstrate that even in complex conflicts spanning borders, conflict resolution approaches remain fundamentally focused on events and grievances that occurred within a given nation-state and are unequipped to deal with regional dimensions of memory, which nonetheless, I argue, exert powerful impact on prospects for peace.

The paper sets its investigation in the context of arguably one of the most complex and geographically layered conflicts of recent decades. As such, the Great Lakes Region is a key case study, pushing us to think in more imaginative and complex ways about memory. The violent crises in the Great Lakes have been cyclical and interconnected. Rwanda and Burundi have been characterized by bouts of ethnic

¹ This is not to mean that memory is an independent agent and exerting autonomous force. Memory is socially constructed. What the paper argues is simply that memory, when in the hands of key actors who indeed have the power to shape it, is a key ingredient in conflict dynamics, both in the ways in which it can fuel grievance, and in attempts at diffusion of conflict.

violence ever since independence that culminated in the 1994 Rwandan genocide and spilled across the borders via vast refugee flows. The genocide in turn acted as a catalyst of one of the most complex wars on the African continent. The violent confrontations that took place on the territory of the DRC between 1997 and 2003, and the violence that lingers to this day, have involved no less than eight neighboring African nations and a multiplicity of local armed groups (Prunier 2009, Lemarchand 2009, Verhoeven and Roessler 2016). But the conflict in Central Africa is not only very much regionally constituted in terms of actual geographical spread, it is also where regional history and collective memories are deployed and contested, they become protagonists to conflict itself and continue to be axes of dispute and tension in so-called 'post-conflict' commemoration and peace-building practice as well.

While the centrality of historical memory— particularly the uses and abuses of stories of origin— have been acknowledged through seminal works such as those of Jan Vansina (2004) on Rwanda and René Lemarchand (1996) on Burundi, few scholars have attempted to glance the problematique through squarely regional lens and have instead studied what they called political 'myths' (Lemarchand 1999), the uses of stories of origin to political ends and at times violent attempts at exclusionary nation-building within particular national contexts. Mahmood Mamdani (2002) remains one of the few scholars who has intimated a more regional constitution of conflict-contributing memory in the Great Lakes in his essay 'African States, Citizenship and War,' Mamdani shows how a particular, exclusionary form of citizenship, a legacy of colonialism, has been replicated across Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC, producing a cycle of displacement, conflict and challenges to peace building. A particular form of non-democratic citizenship is indeed still being reproduced across the region and fuels

conflict and constraints nation-building in its aftermath. Importantly, memory shared across borders mediates this dynamic. Thus our limits on imagining memory in its regional dimensions acts to hinder our attempts at conflict transformation as well.

But memory at regional level is not only about social fracture as more commonly understood, it can also refer to the transnational dimensions of nationalism. Hence we must seriously investigate the degree to which memories spanning borders have the potential to be both conflict producing and conflict diffusing. Scholars have begun exploring nationalist groups and movements based across borders and inspired through their exilic experience. Scholarship on national liberation movements in southern Africa has begun to explore the fundamentally ‘transnational’ operation of ‘nationalist’ movements, which were firmly embedded in the region and mobile across borders (see Hayes 2014, MacMillan 2013, Terretta 2010, White and Larmer 2014). This has certainly been the case for the second wave of liberation movements as well, as the case of the Rwanda Patriotic Front shows.

Most recently, Larmer and Kennes (2016) have traced the fascinating history of the Katangese gendarmes, the short-lived army of a self-declared Katanga state in the southern reaches of the Congo (today DRC) whose members have dispersed across the region after the secession failed, having been mobilized and demobilized in regional conflicts, incursions into the Congo, and later the integrated DRC army. The authors argue that it was a common project of imagining a homeland, resuscitating memories of secession that provided an identity over time to ex-militaries spread beyond the borders of the DRC. Understanding this group ‘necessitates a dynamic, mobile historical analysis, following the gendarmes across borders’ (2016:2).

Similarly, the RPF nationalism studied here was born in exile, across a number of countries in the region, and later ‘repatriated’ home through a military invasion and capture of power.

The present paper contributes to and extends these debates by exploring the nexus between memory and conflict, the actual *mechanisms* through which memory in its regional dimension impinges on post-war social cohesion and the prospects for durable peace. In this respect, the paper shows that complex conflicts spin diverse ‘regimes of memory’—different ways in which memory impacts conflict. Region-based memory can be used to fuel conflict or, as will be shown, it can be deployed in nation-building, seemingly opposed projects as far as social cohesion is concerned. I call these two regimes ‘contestatory’ and ‘consolidatory’ – the former referring to what unravels society (memories fuelling continued grievances), the latter to what is meant to restore social cohesion (memory deployed in nation-building). The distinct contribution of this paper is its focus on the little-studied mobile diasporic memory—memory born in regional exile transplanted ‘home’ to nation-build— and on analyzing the two contrasting regimes of memory alongside each other with the following core question in mind: What is the relationship between regional strands of memory and social cohesion, and can our very ‘imagining regionally’ help us better tailor our conflict transformation initiatives?

This duality of region-based memory— that it has defined and been defined by social fracture, and it has also been deployed, perhaps paradoxically, in post-conflict attempts at nation building— derives from the productive ambiguity that lies at the root of the concept. Are region-wide memories the shared meanings/representations

across the span of a region? Or can they even exist in one locality upon which people from across a region coalesce and where they deploy their diasporic recollections to a common purpose, or say where, without moving, people deploy regionally constructed frameworks of analysis of their national predicaments? In this paper, I explore both aspects since I don't take the physical location as primary to our definition but rather the community of experience, whether real or imagined. The paper thus analyses memory both as the shared networks of meaning across national boundaries and the ways in which people who were dispersed across a region come together to, paradoxically, craft a nationalist memory by deploying a distinctly regional one. This latter aspect builds on my long-term research on the politics of nation building in Rwanda.

The above has implications vis-à-vis the broader conception of a region. There are different ways to conceptualize it. One way to proceed is through a pre-definition of region as a collection of contiguous territorial units, whether nation-states, municipalities or groups of people. But this approach is unwieldy as it might not encompass the phenomenon at hand. The second option is to define regions more organically and dynamically as networks of interaction, whether exchange, action, influence or impact. In this second conception, regions are not pre-defined geographically but geographies self-define through the events and interactions that tie areas together. This opens up all sorts of interesting ways to think of region-based memory and its 'mobility.' In this conception, both region and memory become expandable, and they can also be carried – as in literally where the regional diaspora returns home and deploys memory and memory building in their post-war reconstruction. The case of Rwanda demonstrates this most clearly. The refugee

communities produced through violence rooted in divisive memory traded across borders consolidated an ostensibly alternative, ‘unifying’ nationalism, and repatriated it home.

A key, overarching concern of the paper is of course to consider whether these two regional regimes – the fracturing versus the unification—do indeed, in the final analysis, show us very different deployments of memory. Does one indeed fuel conflict whereas the latter promotes peace? In other words, what are their actual impacts on peace building in the region? The answer might be more paradoxical than expected. While paying attention to the contestations over region-based memory can remind us that much more work is still necessary when it comes to peace building and channel our attention in productive ways, being lulled by the consolidatory regime might merely obscure the fractures— local, national and regional in scope— that such new, regionally-sourced nationalist memory merely obscures.

In what follows, I first draw out the key ways in which memory and conflict have been interacting in the Great Lakes Region historically.² Rather than simply providing a useful historical backdrop to later empirical sections, the section re-interprets historical material through the lens of region-based memory as an active variable in conflict dynamics, proposing three key ways in which memory and conflict have interacted over time. The empirical sections follow and trace the ways in which region-wide memory can be deployed to fuel or to diffuse conflict. This duality will be specifically explored on the case of the Rwandan genocide and its legacy. The paper will demonstrate the way in which genocide within a single state came to

² For clarity, an area which here comprises Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

produce a geographically much broader memory fracture – a contested and antagonistic narrative dividing people regionally— and conversely, how region-spanning memory of a Rwandan diaspora came to inform nation building in the post-genocide state. Each empirical section closes with an exploration of how region-based memory squares up with dominant approaches to peace building. The paper draws on extensive field research in Central Africa, mostly qualitative in nature, drawing on over two hundred interviews, documentary sources, in addition to ethnographic observation, carried out principally in Rwanda and Burundi between 2008 and 2015.

The Great Lakes Region: Tracing the Historical Consolidation of Cross-Border Memory Regimes

In which ways do conflict and memory intersect on a regional level? The intricacies of a concrete case demonstrate at least three ways in which this happens: First, the regional circulation of divisive historical narratives can directly contribute to violence. Second, a reductive framing of national crises against dynamics elsewhere in the region can contribute to polarization of communities and escalation of domestic crises. Finally, the formation of diasporic memory resulting from conflict-induced migrations can result in new nationalist visions and alternative historical narratives that aim to be inclusive, to unify rather than divide.

Importantly, it is not simply the violent conflict itself that spins memory across a region but its very *roots* lie in region-based memory. Specifically, the underlying cause is the exclusionary nature of citizenship rooted in ethnonationalist imaginings of belonging, traceable to colonial racist representations and practices in the region,

including in Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC, all of which were under Belgian colonial rule. Though colonial rule is more often remembered for creating ‘artificial’ borders and importing the nation-state form, it is colonial rule that in fact first laid the groundwork for regionalization of memory. Ready-made racialized interpretive grids imported by the colonialists were adapted to local circumstances and became ultimately instrumentalized from below. They entered a local repertoire of myths (Lemarchand 1999, Jackson 2006) and offered a way of interpreting local dynamics in much broader terms.

The so-called ‘Hamitic hypothesis’ lies at the core of such regionalism. The colonialists racialized social differences and vested racial supremacy and power in the hands of one group, incidentally the minority in both Burundi and Rwanda– the Tutsi. The predominantly pastoralist Tutsi were considered superior as so-called Hamites, allegedly a branch of the Caucasian race (see Taylor 1999, Mamdani 2001, Stanton 2004, Eltringham 2006). The Hamitic hypothesis was politically instrumentalized not only during colonialism when it concentrated power and control into the hands of a minority, but after independence as well. When the Hutu majority took power in Rwanda in 1959, the Hamitic hypothesis was deployed to political effect yet gain, but this time not to extol but rather to condemn the minority. The Rwandan elites used it to highlight the ‘extraneous provenance’ of the Tutsi, painting them as ‘invaders who have stolen our country’ (Eltringham 2006). During the 1990-1994 civil war in Rwanda, the invading Tutsi refugees were portrayed as foreigners set on recapturing power and re-establishing an oppressive monarchy. These images and exclusionary rhetoric were used to justify the 1994 genocide. The Hamitic hypothesis was also operative and politically deployed in neighboring Burundi.

Such distorted narratives found their more potent regional version in another myth, that of the 'Hima-Tutsi empire,' a narrative that has also expanded well beyond Rwanda and Burundi to the DRC, Uganda and beyond. Rwanda's and Uganda's more recent military involvement and influence in the DRC has helped to resuscitate and consolidate this narrative of an 'outsider' minority set on creating and expanding an 'empire' in the region – again referencing the minority ethnic status of the elites in power in Rwanda since 1994, in Burundi until 2003, in Uganda since 1986, and of the rebel groups they support in the DRC. The local Congolese self-defence groups (known as Mai Mai) reproduce this rhetoric: 'The [Tutsi] ambition to create an empire here in Central Africa is the cause of our suffering' (quoted in Hoffman 2006: 6). 'There is a sincere concern amongst the Mai Mai that the RCD rebellion [believed to be directed by Rwanda and Uganda] was indeed an attempt to annex the Kivus and parts of Maniema into a Tutsi-Hima empire and that this would imply the systematic elimination a large part of the autochthonous population' (ibid: 6). Importantly, it is 'experienced as not only an aggression against the Congo but against all Bantus of Central Africa' (ibid).

However distorted these narratives, they have strong regional presence and have had real impact on the ground. 'It is amazing to what extent the ethnic stereotypes and conflicts that were born in Rwanda contaminated the rest of the region,' writes Stearns (2011), 'No other image plagues the Congolese imagination as much as that of the Tutsi aggressor. No other sentiment has justified as much violence in the Congo as anti-Tutsi ideology. Again and again, in the various waves of conflict in the Congo, the Tutsi community has taken centre stage, as victims and killers. This antagonism is

fueled by struggles over land tenure, citizenship, and access to resources, but also and most directly by popular prejudice and a vicious circle of revenge.’ (Stearns 2011:79).

The narratives above directly formed the politics of exclusion witnessed in the region. The nationalisms that formed in the post-independence period either excluded the majority (i.e. Burundi’s Tutsi ethnocracy until the 1990s, Rwanda post-genocide) or they excluded the minority(ies) (i.e. Rwanda’s 1st and 2nd Republics, Zaire under Mobutu). While in Rwanda the Hutu majority took power in 1959 to the discrimination and exclusion of the Tutsi minority, in Burundi conversely the Tutsi minority held on to power for decades after independence, to the political exclusion and even violent suppression of the majority Hutu. In the DRC, a complex interplay of inclusion and exclusion also developed and saw the consolidation of the *autochtony* (indigeneity) versus *allogénéité* (outsider status) discourses. Long-established groups of Kinyarwanda and Kirundi speakers (particularly the Banyamulenge in South Kivu and Banyamasisi in North Kivu) were excluded from full belonging on account of their immigrant status.^v In all of these cases, the nation was read along narrow lines, with powerful exclusions of segments of the social body from the full membership and access to power, economy and even moral community.

Besides toxic regional narratives of origin and belonging, a related regional dynamic was at play and namely the framing of the political situation at home against situations elsewhere in the region. Such ‘vicarious remembrance’ involved the reading one’s own predicament through past and present (violent) events across the border. For most of their post-colonial history, Burundi and Rwanda were seemingly symmetrical opposites of each other— while Rwanda was dominated by the majority

Hutu (first southern Hutu, then northern Hutu), Burundi was ruled by the minority Tutsi (specifically the Banyabururi elites). The two countries were not of course exact inversions of each other, with Burundi's social diversity more complex and less ethnicised at independence (Lemarchand 1996), but what matters is that people read history across the border as inspiration and omen of what could come. As a result of this framing, the events in Rwanda, especially the Hutu seizure of power in the 1959 'social revolution' both inspired the masses in Burundi and confirmed the worst fears of the Burundian elite. This 'mirror image dynamics' continued and created a unique form of regionalization of national crises.

In effect, through vicarious remembrance Burundi's political elites took a 'false definition' of the social problem upon themselves – reading their own predicament in line with Rwanda, whose social composition was similar and yet not identical and less complex.³ Nonetheless, as Lemarchand (1996) argues, this gradually turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy: 'The Rwanda revolution of 1959, for one thing, had a decisive psychological impact on ethnic self-perceptions in Burundi. The coming to power of Hutu politicians in Rwanda led to many of their kinsmen in Burundi to share their political objectives, in turn intensifying fears of ethnic domination among the Tutsi of Burundi. Thus by giving the Burundi situation a false definition to start with, a definition patterned on the Rwandan situation, Hutu politicians evoked a new behavior both among themselves and the Tutsi which made their originally false imputations true. Ethnic conflict thus took on the quality of a 'self-fulfilling prophecy.'"

³ In Burundi, there was a separate Ganwa princely class, and the Tutsi divided into Hima and Banyaruguru.

In a sense, Burundi today still faces the ‘false definition to start with’ by being constantly compared to its neighbor Rwanda. The ongoing 2015 electoral crisis and the violence and repression it produced are being read against the Rwandan genocide of 1994 with media accounts highlighting both its ethnic character and its potential to turn to genocide. Countless media reports engage in this sort of mischaracterization,^{vi} albeit indirectly, insinuating possibilities rather than stating them directly (for an in-depth discussion see Purdeková 2017b). Often, media releases end with statements such as: ‘Burundi neighbors Rwanda and has a similar ethnic make-up to the country whose genocide in 1994 still casts long shadows of shame and fear.’^{vii}

Phrases such as this are meant to unlock for the foreign reader the nature of the conflict and the nature of possible escalation. But while politics of exclusion still lies at the root of the most recent crisis (specifically, the democratic rollback evidenced in the incumbent’s disdain for presidential term limits and the increasingly authoritarian rule by the dominant party) to read the violence first and foremost through the neighbor’s past and through the ethnic lens is problematic. When considered closely, the violence falls across political partisan lines rather than ethnic lines, pitting the government against its opposition. In a sense though, the media misrepresentation demonstrates quite effectively the continued power of particular conflict frames, and their regional scope.

Importantly, it was not only Burundi watching Rwanda, being defined and self-defined through its neighbor, but vice versa as well. The killing of a first democratically elected Hutu president in Burundi in 1993, for example, significantly contributed to the consolidation of extremist, anti-Tutsi forces in Rwanda. These

examples show us a unique regional symmetry of violence that has developed in the Great Lakes mediated through vicarious remembrance.

In addition to regionalized colonial myths and self-fulfilling prophecies, there is also the more mundane fact of regional migration that set the context for a regional extent of both war and conflicted memory of it. In other words, conflict and migration contributed to the formation of a diasporic memory spanning borders. Through waves of migration both forced and assisted, Kinyarwanda speakers, both Hutu and Tutsi, have come to inhabit a number of countries in the region, including Rwanda, Burundi, DRC, Uganda and Tanzania. 'Since the 1960s Rwandese, Congolese and Burundian refugee households have been dispersed across East and Central Africa' (Daley 2013:907). This resulted in 'a reality of transnationalism in the region' (ibid).

Tutsi refugees from Rwanda from 1959 onwards deserve closer attention, particularly those settled in neighboring Uganda. The Rwandan refugee communities in Uganda felt powerfully their exclusion from citizenship, despite or precisely because they were fighting with the Ugandan National Resistance Movement (NRM) and helped it to successfully seize power in 1986. Despite this 'ultimate sacrifice' for another country, the Banyarwanda refugees were not granted citizenship in Uganda. Rwanda, on the other hand, was not allowing them to come back. This double exclusion prepared the ground for a militarized repatriation.

Decades of exclusion in their host countries led to the establishment among the Tutsi refugees in Uganda of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and to 'mass mobilization' among all displaced Rwandans in the diaspora. The RPF cadres across the region

actively kindled memories of home and the past. In essence, this was a regionally embedded nationalist reconstruction, later literally ‘repatriated’ home. In 1990, the RPF invaded Rwanda, sparking a four-year civil war, which culminated in the 1994 genocide perpetrated by the embattled and increasingly extremist government against the Tutsi population. The RPF finally captured power in July 1994 becoming the dominant political force in the country. The movement-turned-party continued to tighten its grip on domestic political space over time and came to define the contours of post-genocide reconstruction and nation-building.

As we can already see, layers of exclusion were reproduced over time. But the story of conflict does not end here. RPF’s takeover of power saw massive outmigration, now of Rwandan Hutu populations into the DRC, Tanzania, Burundi and beyond, and the concomitant spread of the conflict, into the DRC especially. The refugee camps in the DRC became de-facto states and bases for the fleeing *genocidaires*. The logic of the genocide was likewise spread into the territory of Eastern DRC, where the remnants of extremist militias were targeting all Tutsi Kinyarwanda speakers in the region. Violence and its logics were thus spread and regionalized in the most literal sense.

Citing security concerns, in 1996 the new RPF-led government in Kigali decided to dismantle the DRC camps forcibly and to force repatriations from them back to Rwanda. Those unwilling to return were pursued across the DRC, with a terrible human cost (see Prunier 2009). The inability of the Rwanda forces to neutralize the remnants of the former genocidal militias created a permanent Rwandan presence in the DRC, which in turn drew hostility from local populations. The toxic historical

narratives discussed above were once again resuscitated and ‘outsiders,’ ‘Rwandans’ blamed by local populations for the continued insecurity in their country. Stability in Rwanda in late 1990s and onwards has thus been married to continued instability in the neighboring region, where Rwandaphones and Rwandan forces become central protagonists in the crisis and are so to this day.

In sum, waves of migration out of partial, exclusionary nationalisms have come to constitute a region-wide conflict and region-wide memory. The conflict cycle hasn’t been broken to this day and, as I will show, memory is implicated. I will attempt to do this in two ways, by asking: First, has the regional nature of contested narratives been acknowledged? And second, has a new regionally sourced nationalism produced a more inclusionary form of citizenship? In answering these questions, I will zoom in on the legacies of the Rwandan genocide. I will first look at the way in which the genocide and its outfall created a contested memory *beyond* the borders of that single nation-state, why this matters and whether this has been acknowledged post-conflict. Second, I will look at how regional diasporic memory has been deployed by the returning diaspora *in* Rwanda for the purposes of nation building and reconciliation after the genocide.

A Memory Regime of Contestation: Conflicted Memories and Silenced Memory in the Region

First, let us explore memory as a regime of region-wide contestation. The 1994 Rwandan genocide, the civil war that led to it and the regional war that was spawned as its result, have created a fractured memory regime, layers of region-wide memory

that lie in tension and produce contestations. The fracture expands beyond the borders of Rwanda and is at its core the result of a very partial acknowledgment of victimhood and partial remembrance. Together these are a potent show of the lingering meta-conflict— conflict over the meaning of conflict— in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

There are concretely two fracturing elements: First, the wider regional predicament has not been officially acknowledged, and namely that both the genocide crimes and the crimes perpetrated by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF)^{viii} extend beyond Rwanda. Second, the Hutu and Twa victims of the RPF war, and later the RPF-led government's incursions into the DRC are completely suppressed in public memory (see Zorbas 2004). While the Tutsi and a small number of elite Hutu victims of genocide inhabit a zone of remembrance, the Hutu victims of RPF crimes bear a difficult and politically imposed silence. In other words, public memory of violence is nation-state framed and partial, remembering only certain aspects of violence.

The suppressed memory and counter-memory of course have layers. There are those who do not deny the genocide but highlight crimes that were committed alongside it. There also more extreme narratives still circulating across the region, some denying/negating genocide (*guhakana*) and others diminishing/trivializing (*gupfobya*) the crime of genocide. These latter narratives add fuel to the Rwandan government's political repression, offering a ready-made frame for attacking all those who oppose the political establishment rather than simply those who threaten the safety of the population. *Abahakana* – the deniers of genocide, and the *abakwirakwiza* – those who spread genocide ideology, have become potent political labels. But 'genocide

ideology' (*ingengabitekerezo ya jenocide*) is not only a key domestic concern-cum-tool of the government, it has 'spread' (Rusagara 2012) across the region, adding fuel to Rwanda's interventionism outside its borders.

Fractures exist on another level yet, this time not resulting from the genocide-related violence but rather Rwandan interventionism in the region following the genocide. After their flight to the DRC, the genocidal government and the remnants of the *interahamwe* militias remained active, launching incursions into Rwanda, intimidating the refugees, and targeting local populations. The 'security issues' has triggered long-standing interventionism from Rwanda (and aided by Uganda and Burundi) in the Congo. The presence of Rwandan troops on Congolese soil and their support to a string of local militias was initially denied in Kigali but is well documented today. Rwanda helped sponsor, train and man local militias mostly drawn from the ethnically Tutsi groups in the Eastern DRC, first helping to put together the AFDL, then the RDC, followed by the CNDP and finally the M23.

The foreign meddling and resulting insecurity have turned local communities against both Rwanda and Kinyarwanda-speakers in the DRC, and increasingly so over time (see Mathys 2017). We could argue post-genocide Rwandan interventionism has led to increased polarization and profiling of memory. While the Tutsi in the region, in Rwanda and the DRC, see the possibility of annihilation and see interventionism as legitimate self-defence, opponents see this as an invasion, imputing expansionary motives to the Tutsi as a group. They deploy tropes of rightful belonging and autochtony on the one hand, versus allogenité and outsider status of the Tutsi on the other (as 'newcomers,' immigrants, outsiders), resuscitating once again myths that

took root during colonialism and that have been deployed to violent ends after independence (see Verweijen 2015, Boas and Dunn 2014; Jackson 2006; Mathys 2017).

Let me return to a question I asked at the beginning: If memory of conflict is regional, what are then the repercussions for dealing with such past through resolution regimes (transitional justice, reconciliation, unity building) that operate within the bounds of the nation-state? The above analysis demonstrates that in places like the Great Lakes Region of Africa, reconciling opposed memories needs to be a regional endeavor. A number of factors still preclude this, however. Besides the practical difficulties in operationalizing a regional approach, there are important political challenges, which include the narrowly-constituted and undemocratic nature of political regimes in the region and the political motivations of elites in power to suppress aspects of memory, in Rwanda, Burundi, DRC and beyond.

It must be noted that what we call for here is distinct from ‘regional peace building approaches’ (van Leeuwen 2008) as these have been promoted on the ground. The International Conference on the Great Lakes (ICGL), operative since 2000, is composed of states and operates at a very figurative, diplomatic level, being subject to all the tensions and inter-state conflicts of interests we witness in the region. The ICGL attempts at resolution do not cut deep enough to shared grievances and imaginaries. But even regional *civil society* peace building efforts have faced challenges. As van Leeuwen has observed, ‘local and international organizations have difficulty in analyzing the regional character of conflict and arriving at collaborative

regional strategies,’ and they are ‘deeply embedded in the politics of regional conflict.’

A strategy recognizing regional dimensions of memory thus must be built on a different foundation. It cannot be simply summative, adding separate national actors together, whether at state level or locally. The framework and the institution supporting it must be regional from the outset, based in a neutral setting and sourcing staff based on its regional vision and purpose; it must document, analyze and structure action through a regional lens, rather than the standard run through a set of national or even local scenarios. The aim of such institution must be the search for interconnections across boundaries, and the ways in which these have and continue to create impacts at different scales. Again, such approach is unique and missing; it is different from universalized approaches anchored in human rights, different from calls to ‘hybridize’ transitional justice by applying it to local contexts, and different yet from research frames such those of the International Crisis Group (ICG) that again tend to focus on particular countries.

Official commemoration of the Rwandan genocide shows these challenges well. The practice on the ground is not only i) confined to the territory of Rwanda; but ii) even within the country, it is partial, denying certain types of victimhood and certain layers of memory that span the region. The meta-conflict in many senses continues through the practices of commemoration whereby the Hutu victims of violence are silenced, excluded from the narrative, completely left out of the transitional justice process (see Thomson 2013). Victims of national actors abroad^{ix} are also completely silenced and excluded from the new memory being forged.

The Rwandan annual commemoration Kwibuka (Remember) has become a truly global enterprise. During the early days of April, the embassies and ‘friends of Rwanda’ come together, organize events, and as such truly ‘co-remember’ the genocide of the Tutsi. Didactic memorials such as those in Nyamata and Ntarama dot the Rwandan landscape, filled with neatly arranged remains of the victims.

Commemoration activities fill the year. In these performances and spaces, the past is both actively remembered and actively suppressed at once. The Hutu victims of RPF crimes across the region are not spoken about. Those who dare to publically mention them can end up in jail. But in private of course, people do speak of and acknowledge the Hutu victims. The sites of violence and shallow graves are etched in memory if not in the landscape.

In Burundi, it is not victor’s justice but rather a public silence on the past that prevails. While local communities and organizations have organized reconciliation and commemoration initiatives with different degrees of success (see e.g. Purdeková 2017a), at the national level there is a political stall in pushing a meaningful TJ process forward (Vandeginste 2012). This is due to what is known as an ‘alliance of impunity.’ All key political actors in the power-sharing government have participated in violence and have thus incentives to frustrate the process of justice. In the DRC, as discussed, the conflict as well as the metaconflict are still very much under way and little has been done by way of transitional justice. Overall then, what we witness in the region is fragmented memory. Fractures run not only along the broad lines and divides of the conflict whereby the victor can claim the narrative and political space alike, (re) producing grievances through the suppression of strains of memory.

Fractures also run along separate nation-state lines, whereby each government reframes region-wide memory in accordance with the domestic constellation of political interest and incentive. But even in cases of memory suppression or simply lack of action on the past such as in post-war Burundi, people at the local level have been countering forces of oblivion and erasure of memory with different degrees of involvement and success (see Purdeková 2017a). But they have been acting in very localized arenas – thinking and acting regionally, as in connecting the margins across borders, might thus be a productive step forward.

What does this suggest? It suggests we the need to reach deeper beyond analysis and commemoration of specific nationally-bound events such as the Burundi genocide of 1972 or the Rwanda genocide of 1994. Such delimitations, while not incorrect, enclose us too much in the national space, precluding us from seeing the wider scope of the conflict. They preclude us from discussions about the distinctly regional roots of cyclical and long-term political crises in the region; from paying attention to potent narratives and myths that have taken shape and form across the region, and the nature of nationalism that these have given rise to. Roots and outcomes are interconnected. Representations of the past rooted in exclusionary narratives of belonging translate into the physical realm – constituting violence and forced migration – which then turn to the representational realm once again – shaping the ways in which these practices are remembered and the types of nationalisms that are envisioned. While in this section we have considered remembrance, the next section considers the nature of post-genocide nation-building and whether the sort of regionally-constituted nationalism we witness in Rwanda does indeed (as it claims to) reverse the exclusionary forms of belonging of the past.

A Memory Regime of Consolidation: Regionalism in the Service of Nation-Building

In this second section, I would like to explore the notion of diasporic memory as a regime of consolidation rather than contestation, focusing on the ways in which memory born in exile has been deployed (whether successfully or not) to build social cohesion. The case of post-genocide Rwanda again offers a good example. Nation-building here draws on diasporic memory, on transnational experience of exile, on lives and pasts elsewhere, on region-wide memory converging upon the national space, physical and representational.

Rwanda is a unique case in that the new post-genocide elite in Rwanda hails from exile. Most of those who hold power in today's Rwanda hail from Paul Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) formed in exile in Uganda, mobilizing across the diaspora, later capturing power and now dominating the domestic political space. Much of the elite is thus composed by former refugees, mostly of the Tutsi minority and mostly refugees from Uganda where the RPF originated. Many key figures in the government have grown up in neighboring countries, some of them entered Rwanda for the first time after the genocide. It is them who became and continue to be the elite responsible for reconstruction after the war and for defining the nature of post-genocide nation building (see Purdeková 2015).

The ‘consolidations’ aspect of this paper’s argument then refers to the involvement of memory in promoting a ‘social whole,’ specifically its involvement in the way in which the new Rwanda or Rwandanness is imagined *within* Rwanda after the genocide. Against the toxic narratives of division and origin that fuelled the violence in the region since the end of colonialism, the RPF has consolidated a new official nationalist narrative in exile, one that de-emphasizes ethnicity and highlights and aims to build a common ‘Rwandanness’ (*Ubunyarwanda*). In fact, in post-genocide Rwanda, the mention of ethnicity has been forbidden (see Purdeková 2008, Eltringham 2011).

The story of a repatriated nationalism is a fascinating next chapter to Liisa Malkki’s explorations of the constructions of historicity, subjectivity and national consciousness among encamped refugees in exile. In her seminal book *Purity and Exile* Malkki detailed the ways in which Hutu refugees fleeing the 1972 genocide in Burundi became politicized and weaved very strong ethnonationalist narratives in Tanzanian refugee camps. Interestingly, their nationalism had a locus in the region, it arose after the crossing of boundaries. What we have in Rwanda after the genocide is both a flipside and the next chapter of this process: Former refugees capture political space at ‘home’ through armed repatriation and are in a position to define the nature of inclusion, the new narrative of the nation, drawing in the process on their exile experiences. Diasporic experiences replanted home thus now shape a new form of nation building.

But what are some of the concrete ways in which regionally-anchored memory is involved? For one, the diasporic elite has been drawing on their experiences in exile in crafting special nation building technologies. The successful mobilization strategies of refugee political organizations in the 1980s strongly shaped their approach after capture of power in Kigali. The reinventions of tradition after the genocide— the explosion of ‘neo-traditionality’ in modern Rwanda in forms of development and reconciliation activities allegedly inspired in pre-colonial practice (see Purdeková 2015)— and more specifically yet, the uses of the technology of the camp for political and national education are all inspired by and crafted on the basis of experiences in the diaspora. One of my interviewees vividly evoked the clandestine meetings mixing cultural awareness and political education for the Banyarwanda refugees. The exile-born RPF was ‘mobilizing members from all over, meet for a month, they could take a home from someone, even in Kampala, and meet there, so that the security and police would not know, there were many strategies, just a family “visit,” there were strict communication rules, but this was just political and cultural, not military, the noise could attract some curiosity.’^x These clandestine ‘schools’ thus mixed the raising of cultural awareness (‘to remember Rwanda’^{xi} in exile) with the political purpose of political mobilization (‘to bring the people together to share the ideals of the RPF’^{xii}).

The returnee elite in Rwanda has been drawing on such regional practices of political education, which they have modified to serve the needs of the post-genocide political project. ‘it started with the RPF [in exile] and then was adopted by others [inside Rwanda]. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission used this instrument for all people [Rwandans, after the genocide].’^{xiii} Post-genocide *ingando* ‘civic

education' retreats in remote camps are hailed as the cornerstone of the nation-building project and are the flagship activity of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). In interviews, the returnees often tie Rwanda's new *ingando* and *itorero* camps to precedents elsewhere in the diaspora, the RPF clandestine classes in exile organized to raise political and cultural awareness among the diaspora (described above), but also other precedents, especially the Chaka Mchaka courses in neighboring Uganda that bear the closest parallel, and Tanzania's JKT (Jesh Kugenda Taifa) courses combining military training, social service and nation-building.

And it is paradoxically in these encamped spaces, constituted through memory and experience of regional exile that a distinctly new, *nationalist* history is being inculcated and impressed upon the participants since shortly after the genocide. The *ingando* and *itorero* camps both reflect and promote militaristic culture and values of the exile guerilla movement ('They want [us] to go through what the soldiers went through, the food, the training, this is what the RPF soldiers used to eat.'^{xiv}) and reproduce a national vision of a de-ethnicised Rwanda first elaborated and reproduced across diasporic communities through clandestine political schools. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans of all walks of life have already passed through such intense courses.

But the fascinating story of a 'regionally-constituted nationalism' does not end here. Rwanda's repatriated nation building has later been again re-exported to the region. Through a set of proxy forces put together in Kigali, Rwanda has been directly involved not only in military operations and strategy of continuous 'rebellions' in Eastern Congo, but has tried to equally export its dominant vision of nation-building

inspired by military values—from strict boot camps *ingando*-style to emphasis on discipline, sacrifice for a broader goal and love for the nation. In a meeting with the proxy group RCD headed by Ernest Wamba dia Wamba and addressing the disarray, squabbles and low morale among the group's members, Rwanda's President '[Paul] Kagame took the floor. 'Your problem is that you don't love your country. You need to suffer; you are living the good life. When we were in our rebellion, we were so poor that we didn't have plates to eat out of'' (quoted in Stearns 2011).

What type of nation-building is being created through civic education in camps such as *ingando*? Does it live up to its promise of countering the divisive ethnonationalisms that took root in the region in the past? Research in Rwanda suggests that regional experience does not necessarily translate into a more civic and inclusive notion of a nation (Purdeková 2008), one that would be inspired in the complex migration histories and identities and a hybrid sense of belonging. Instead, the accent is on restoring the glorious pre-colonial past, to resurrect 'Rwandanicity' as a cultural ideal, and to underscore loyalty and non-veering from the official line. The dominant nationalist narrative eschews diversity in the name of building common Rwandanness, but its strong emphasis on 'unity' merely papers over divisions that linger under the surface, the authoritarian nature of the government and its narrow base. The nation building project also interlaces with regime building: Regional historical memory is renarrated to serve a very politicized form of nation building, and the government crafts a type of citizenship that emphasizes loyalty to the state and the governing party (see Purdeková 2015).

The regional experience and memory then does not lead to an embrace of transnationalism, for example in commemoration of crimes against the Tutsi in the DRC or a more welcoming attitude to migrants and refugees. There is in fact an important historical parallel to this story on the African continent, bringing us back to a much earlier phase of nationalism during decolonization. The Southern national liberation movements (NLMs) in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique were all fundamentally transnational. Exile and constant movement offered the NLMs not only the ability to mobilize militarily but also the ability to practice politically, to envision and enact politics and stateness. The nationalist movements were shaped by this experience in multiple ways. And yet, this past beyond national borders did not translate into more transnational or inclusive readings of nationalism upon victory and take-over of power at home. South Africa is a case in point, struggling with xenophobia, ‘othering’ of migrants and their exclusion. Similarly, in the Great Lakes Region, transnational pasts and regional memories have thus far not come to effectively challenge the exclusionary discourses and practices of citizenship and the nation-state as the dominant shaper and container of public memory on a painful past.

Conclusions

By way of conclusion, let me return to the core question of the paper: Is it useful to imagine memory, and not only conflict, regionally? The answer must be in the affirmative. Paying attention to imaginaries (whether grievances, differences or communality) shared within a bounded area but one that crosses national borders, is analytically productive in a number of ways at once. The post-colonial conflict in the Great Lakes of Africa set the ground for contested memory but also for diasporic

imaginary after the capture of power. Regionally applied imaginaries of belonging and exclusion have fostered violence and strewn people across borders. Such conflicted past has in turn produced both fractures and festering silences, and new imaginaries of belonging and nationness re-exported across boundaries. Such memory has thus fuelled both lingering social divisions and itinerant nationalisms. To take this duality into account, we can speak of different ‘regimes’ of region-wide memory in operation— such memory can aid state-making and nation-building, and it can be fundamentally fragmentary, undermining these projects because of the ongoing conflicts and the lack of full reconciliation on the past.

As shown on the case of Rwanda, the same actors can in fact participate in both regimes. At the same time as the PRF actively pursues a regionally-sourced nation-building seeped in its guerilla history of a truly transnational diasporic struggle, it also contributes to continued insecurity beyond its borders, which further polarizes communities across the region, producing a regional fracture. In the final reading, however, these two regimes are hardly opposed. The social cohesion being built in Rwanda through the elite’s nation-building attempts reproduces a dominant, top-down vision of unity that silences aspects of the past, reproduces partial victimhood and fosters sense of injustice as a result—social fracture by any other name. Hence though the two regimes are indeed distinct, their outcomes vis-à-vis peace-building might not be always dissimilar.

There isn’t just one way to breach the topic of regional memory as there isn’t just one strand of memory to explore in any given geographical region. Here, I have shown on

the specific example of Rwanda how both the victims of genocide and the killings of the RPF reach beyond the borders of this country. In this case, the study of the two memory regimes unveils a paradox. Perhaps counter-intuitively, paying attention to layers of contestation can remind us that much more work is still necessary when it comes to peace building. It points us in the right direction and underlines our need to expand our understanding and action in line with this more expansive notion of memory. At the same time, and despite its appeals to nation-building, a restorative history, and multiplicity of activities of transitional justice, a consolidatory regime such as that in Rwanda – a new, regionally-sourced nationalist memory appealing to unity and setting itself in opposition to divisive ethnic narratives— might merely obscure the social fractures, local, national and regional in scope, that still persist.

Importantly, the usefulness of ‘imagining regionally’ when it comes to memory extends beyond the realm of analysis. It does not only refine our understanding of memory and conflict, it also informs the practice of conflict resolution where it can expand the available repertoire of action. The paper highlighted the tension between the phenomenon under study –regional in scope- and the way in which it is acted upon. Peace-building and transitional justice cannot be fully successful if regional fractures such as partial victimhood and silenced violence are not recognized and acted upon as such. Peace-building and transitional justice attempts cannot be comprehensive if regional memory is fractured through different, and sometimes competing, national attempts to deal with its legacy and continued impact (i.e. integrationism and de-ethnicisation in Rwanda versus power-sharing and entrenchment of ethnicity in Burundi). As argued in the paper, and with relevance to other regional war complexes around the world, a regional frame does not equal the

summation of national actors, at whatever level, whether grassroots or state house. What does this imply in terms of practice? Practically speaking, a dedicated, independent body such as a commission of regional memory could be established to create a space necessary to supersede nationalist narratives of memory and memory initiatives bound by national boundaries. For example, rather than speaking of a Rwandan genocide as an event confined to the national territory of Rwanda, a regional memory body would re-narrate it as a phenomenon whose roots, extent and impact are regional.

The role of the new regional memory architecture would be to explore and document regional extensions of memory, to suggest forms of resolution spanning borders, and to organize activities towards these ends. It would involve the establishment of regional archives and regional commemoration, amongst other things. This work would create two important contributions of both epistemic and practical value. First, such frame would finally give voice and recognition to migrants and refugees and place their experience more firmly at the center of historical events; it would underscore their predicaments as in need of recognition and redress. Second, such frame would be more firmly decolonial, and open opportunities for decolonial debates and action. If colonialism was key to laying the groundwork for some of the toxic narratives spanning the region, then only a truly regional frame is fit to address and redress this aspect of the past, and explore its legacies and continuities in the present. In sum then, the framework of regional memory has much to offer, and the present paper is merely a small first step towards exploring its full potential.

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<<http://www.africalawinstitute.org/ajls/vol1/no1/zorbas.pdf>>

ⁱ The key insight is that security is contained within specific geographically-defined regions; they form a system that extends and interacts across this wider area.

ⁱⁱ The literature on RCFs explores how seemingly separate conflicts among neighboring countries interact and influence each other across space and time.

ⁱⁱⁱ A brief description of the workshop can be found online at:

<<http://www.jagiellonians.com/single-post/2016/04/18/What-is-regional-memory>>

^{iv} To give an example, a grievance that extends across borders is the silenced violence perpetrated by the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), the dominant political party in Rwanda, both in Rwanda and beyond Rwanda in the DRC. The mention of atrocities at home is suppressed, whereas the atrocities in neighboring DRC are denied. This fosters a regional sense of grievance, and unhelpfully fuels negative portrayals and action against Rwandan communities in the DRC in general. The key to understand here is that there is a shared form hidden at times behind divergent content. The actors involved alongside the RPF differ over time as do immediate motives for perpetration of violence against Hutu civilians. But the suppression and denial of this past, and the resultant grievances and tensions need to be understood in concert, and as a shared pool of grievance in the region. These are not national or even local challenges (though they do have national and local manifestations) and hence cannot be resolved as such.

^v Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko played a complex political game, and the status of Kinyarwanda speakers varied accordingly. With the passage of the 1981 citizenship law, all groups that immigrated after the advent of colonialism were precluded from claiming customary rights to land, and were stripped of full belonging. This affected the Banyamasisi group in North Kivu and the Banyamulenge in South Kivu.

^{vi} Here are some exemplars to give a sense of the discourse: "World looks away as blood flows in Burundi," *The Guardian*, 10 April 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/10/burundi-ethnic-violence-refugees> (accessed April 2017); "Burundi crisis resembles run-up to Rwanda genocide: Editorial," *The Star*, 11 November 2015.

Available at: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2015/11/11/burundi-crisis-resembles-run-up-to-rwanda-genocide-editorial.html> (accessed March 2017).

vii 'The world looks away as blood flows in Burundi,' by Emma Graham-Harrison for the Guardian, 10 April 2016, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/10/burundi-ethnic-violence-refugees>

viii The RPF perpetrated crimes during the civil war (1990-1994) and during the aftermath of the genocide, both on the territory of Rwanda and the neighboring DRC where the RPF in alliance with local actors has pursued and targeted the fleeing Rwandan Hutu.

ix It is estimated that Rwandan forces and their allies in the DRC are responsible for the death tens of thousands of people.

x Interview with an 'independent consultant' and author of a manuscript on RPF history, 22 January 2009, Kigali.

xi Ibid.

xii Ibid.

xiii Interview with the Rwandan Ombudsman, 14 January 2009.

xiv An *ingando* participant recounts to me during a break between lectures, Nkumba, December 16, 2008.